

Is It All Right to Be Sad?

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It was a very hot night . . . not that I needed any excuse. But as soon as dinner was over, I mounted my Stair-o-lator to the second floor and quickly stripped off all my braces. This brought up memories of my mother. Behind closed doors, of course, she would recite the litany of her day and sigh with relief as she stripped off every confining garment from high-heeled shoes to garter belt to girdle. As the sweat poured off me, I matched her item for item and probably sigh for sigh.

Letting my whole body breathe, I stretched out on my high bed, watched the sunset, and grabbed for my latest paperback mystery. I didn't get very far because I could hear Kyra, my 7-year-old daughter, crying in the other room. Ordinarily, that in itself would have caused me to either leap (only figuratively) out of bed or at least call out, "What's the matter?" But I could hear my wife Judy's soothing voice in the background, so I sank back into my reading.

Soon Kyra appeared at the foot of the bed, carrying the ever-comforting panda bear in one hand with the thumb of her other firmly implanted in her mouth, and with tears streaming down her face. I could barely understand a word she was saying, so I reached out and helped her climb up. Words were still not forthcoming, only racking sobs. Holding her close enough so that her tears now were staining my nightshirt, I waited.

"Daddy, I'm so sorry, and I hope you won't think I'm being mean. . . ."

It was such a strange combination—her tears and the

supposed meanness—that I didn't really know how to respond or even if I should. So I didn't.

"Daddy," she began haltingly, repeating again her apology. "I know you do so much. I know you do puzzles with me and games and lots of things that Mommy won't do. . . ." The longer the list of my virtues got, the greater became my anxiety. But I had learned over the years with Kyra that with her having such long-winded parents, the last thing she wanted was to be interrupted—especially when she so obviously had a well-rehearsed or rather thought-through prologue.

"It's just"—and out it came, with tears still flowing—"that sometimes I want you to swim out to the dock with me, and sometimes I want you to go bicycling with me, and sometimes I want you to go on long walks with me, and sometimes I want you to climb or go hiking with me. . . ."

As the list continued, I knew that she knew all the things I could do, but that didn't matter. I started to formulate an answer that included a greater use of a motorized wheelchair when she, far wiser than I, said what had to be said.

"You know, Daddy, I asked Mommy if it was OK to talk about something sad even though you can't do anything about it. She said it was and even that it can be good to get it out. Is it really OK?"

As I whispered "Yes," she mumbled through her loud sucking, "I feel better now." "So do I," I said in return as we lay there cuddling.